

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2009-0021

# Curtz Lake Interpretive Trail And Trailhead

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Carson City Field Office  
5665 Morgan Mill Road  
Carson City, NV 89701

Alpine County, Nevada  
November 2009



## I. INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE & NEED

### INTRODUCTION

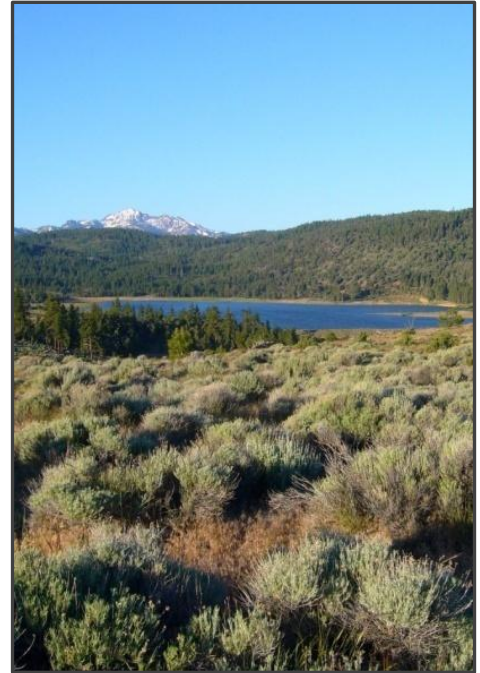
The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Sierra Front Field Office (SFFO) proposes to design, construct and maintain an access road, trailhead, and non-motorized interpretive trail at Curtz Lake located in Alpine County, California. The new facilities would replace or update similar facilities in the area that are outdated and inadequately designed. Funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, this recreation facility enhancement project would also refine interpretive information and themes, consolidate parking and trailhead function in one area, and provide an element of convenience to the users by upgrading the access road and relocating parking away from Airport Road traffic.

Situated in the eastern foothills of the Sierra Nevada, BLM public lands in the area are characterized by its combination of notable scenery and diverse recreation opportunities that include hiking, fishing, scenic touring, dispersed and developed camping, hunting, biking and white water boating. Since the 1960's, BLM lands in this area have been recognized for their high recreational values. The desire to enhance and protect recreation values and natural resources has guided management actions on BLM lands in the County. In 1967, the construction of Indian Creek Reservoir established a focal point for recreational activities in the area.

Over the next ten years, a trail system was constructed and an environmental study area and interpretive trail at Curtz Lake was developed, campground facilities were opened at Indian Creek Reservoir, and 7,044 acres were designated as the Indian Creek Recreation Lands (ICRL).



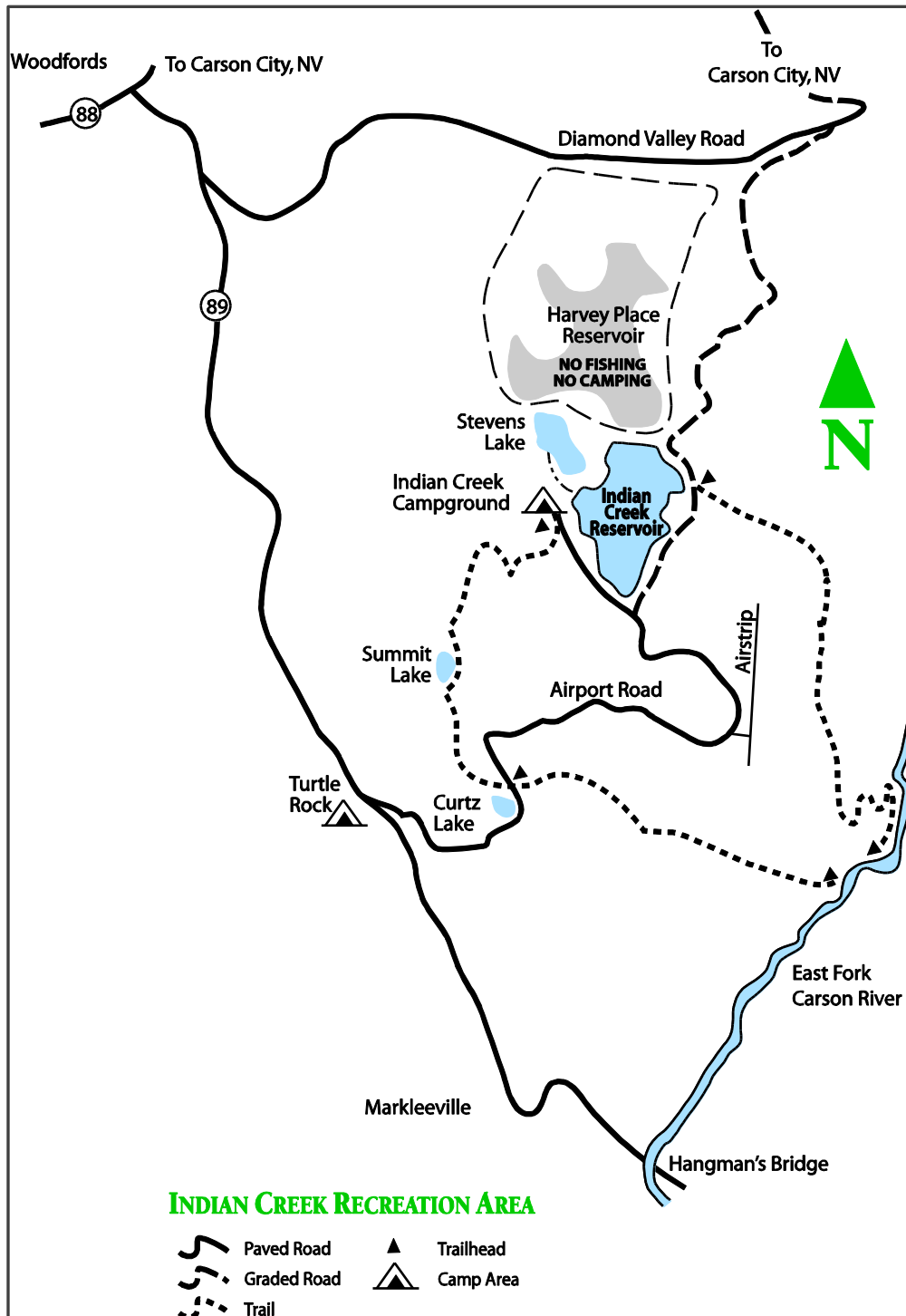
self-guiding interpretive trails (vegetative, soil-geology and aquatic) and a parking area.



The Curtz Lake Environmental Study Area (CLESA) and Curtz Lake Trailhead are situated within ICRL directly off of Airport Road; a paved road that provides main access to Indian Creek Reservoir and related BLM lands (see Attachment A). Completed during the summer of 1972 by the Youth Conservation Corp and the BLM, the CLESA is a highly diversified natural area where natural environmental processes can be observed. Designed for use by the general public and local school groups, the existing study area consists of three connecting

Another parking area at Curtz Lake serves as an intersecting trailhead for the main trail system in the area. The Curtz Lake Trailhead, also constructed in the early 1970's, provides direct access to Summit Lake and the East Fork of the Carson River, making it an integral component of the overall recreation framework for ICRL (Figure 1.1). A control access gate at Curtz Lake Trailhead precludes non-administrative vehicle access to Summit Lake.

Figure 1.1



The purpose of the project is to re-develop recreation based facilities at Curtz Lake to provide safe, accessible and quality recreation and interpretive opportunities to the public. The need for the proposed action is based primarily on public health and safety concerns related to existing access road, trail and trailhead layout and design, noting the following:

1. Vehicle access points to both parking areas are located where line-of sight distances on Airport Road are poor;
2. Pedestrian Airport Road crossings have inadequate line-of-sight distances and are unmarked. The existing interpretive trail parking area is too small to safely accommodate school bus parking, loading and unloading;
3. Existing trail alignments pose safety concerns due to poorly designed road crossings, a steep trail segment and fluctuating site conditions. For example, during wet seasons it is not uncommon for portions of the “aquatic” trail to be under water. An interpretive trail segment may also be located on private land.

The BLM has prepared this Environmental Assessment on the potential effects of recreational facility enhancements on a project area involving up to 190 acres of BLM administered lands in Alpine County, California, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The BLM Sierra Front Field Office manages approximately 18,680 acres of public land in Alpine County.

#### **LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE STATEMENT**

The proposed action and alternatives described below are in conformance with the:

Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001): Section 8 - Recreation, page REC-2, Desired Outcomes, 1: “Provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities on public land under the administration of the Carson City Field Office.” and;

Alpine County Resource Management Plan Amendment (2007): Chapter 2.3, page 2-3: “A completed roads, primitive roads, and trails network would be established through travel management planning by 2010.”

#### **RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER PLANS**

In 2007, the Alpine County Resource Management Plan Amendment (ACRMPA) designated lands in the ICRL as Limited to Designated Routes and set criteria for the inclusion of roads and trails into the road and trail network as established and defined in the ACRMPA. The project would incorporate and designate specific road and trail segments in the project area into the road and trail network developed in the ACRMPA. An interpretive plan would be developed consistent with the proposed action to specifically address the interpretive elements of this project.

## II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

### PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is to design, construct and maintain an access road, trailhead, and a non-motorized interpretive trail off Airport Road adjacent to Curtz Lake. The new facilities would effectively replace similar existing facilities (see Attachment B) in the area that are outdated and poorly designed. The proposed action would also relocate and update the existing Curtz Lake interpretive area to provide elements of accessibility, safety and convenience (see Attachment C).

The proposed action would decommission, or reclaim existing features. This includes two trailheads and certain non-motorized trail segments that were poorly designed and would not be utilized in the new trail layout. A new trailhead and interpretive trail system would be constructed to include a segment of new vehicle access road. Interpretive panels and trail markers would be installed at various points along the interpretive trail. At each interpretive "point", a pad approximately one hundred square feet in size would be constructed to accommodate small groups of 10-15 people. The number of points required and specific trail locations of the points would be determined in a proceeding interpretive trail plan consistent with the proposed action.

The project would entail constructing up to two miles (about 0.6 acre) of non-motorized single-track trail and reclaiming about one mile of the existing interpretive trail system. New single track trail construction would establish an 18-24 inch tread width with native soil tread surfacing. A universal designed trail would be constructed on the west side of Curtz Lake. Approximately 1,200 feet in length and up to five feet wide, the trail segment would incorporate design standards that would provide a moderate degree of accessibility. Natural colored tread surface material such as crushed rock (3/4' minus) or decomposed granite would be used for increased tread firmness and stability.

Single track trail construction and maintenance would be consistent with USFS trail and brushing standards. Construction of the trails network would follow *USFS Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook*, (October 1996 edition), and if necessary, recommended technical manuals referenced in this notebook. The universal design trail would be designed, engineered and constructed consistent with the *Proposed Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas* and/or Universal Design principles. Trails and related features would be constructed or reclaimed with hand and power tools. Rehabilitation would entail recontouring the trail by pulling soil fill and rocks, where available, back into the cut, reseeding and masking (camouflaging) short segments of reclaimed trail with readily available duff and forest litter.

Two existing parking areas would be reclaimed and one new trailhead/parking area (~1/4 acre) with kiosk would be constructed. The new parking area would be designed to accommodate one school bus and several passenger vehicles. The parking area would have a pull through design approximately 200' long by 30' wide. The trailhead would be designed, engineered and constructed consistent with the *Proposed Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas* and/or Universal Design principles. Six to eight pine trees would be removed including understory vegetation. The parking area would be constructed with heavy equipment. Trees would be removed with a chainsaw. Tree trunks or boles would be utilized onsite as access control barriers. Small tree limbs would be mulched or removed from site.

Portable sanitation would be positioned near the trailhead during peak use of the area to determine potential need and optimum location of a permanent vault toilet, if warranted. The existing gate located on the trail to Summit Lake would be relocated west of the new trailhead and painted flat brown. Up to fifty feet of wooden fence-line on either side of the relocate gate would be constructed to function as a vehicle barrier. A pedestrian fence pass-thru near the gate would be designed and constructed using universal design principles.

The existing vehicle access off of Airport Road would be relocated approximately 200' to the south to increase line-of-sight distance and to establish a road elevation along the natural contour. Dependant on a final engineering plan, additional design features may include the following to improve site distances and/or reduce traffic speed at this intersection on Airport Road:

- approximately 250 feet of cut road bank along the west side of Airport Road may be lowered or “cut back” further using heavy equipment, and/or
  - speed bump(s) or other vehicle speed mitigation strategies may be used;
- two to four pinon pine trees may be removed.

An “apron” would be constructed to County and/or CALTRANS standards at the intersection of Airport Road and the new trailhead access road. Standardized traffic safety signs (2) and a trailhead entrance sign would be installed along Airport Road. Earth tone gravel road base (e.g. Type II) would be applied to both the existing and new road segments from Airport Road to the relocated gate. A vehicle pullout would be constructed on the north side of the existing Summit Lake access road to allow for vehicles to pass safely. Waddles and/or other sediment control techniques would be incorporated into the design to preclude short term sedimentation of the adjacent Curtz Lake. Native seed would be utilized to restore native vegetation on fill slopes.

Design features or Best Management Practices (BMP's) would include but not limited to: (1) minimizing unnecessary surface disturbance during construction phase; (2) install waddles and/or other erosion control devices; (3) recontour and seed exposed non-tread surface disturbances with native seed mix; (4) surface access road with natural colored gravel road base; (5) design/construct trails using accepted design standards; (6) all new features would be designed and constructed above Curtz Lake's 20 year high water mark; and (7) additional BMP's as identified in engineered construction plans.

Applicable project permits would be obtained through the appropriate source. All contractor developed engineering and final design plans, including the interpretive plan design process, would be open for additional public review and comment period.

Per the 2007 ACRMPA, and as defined by the travel management road and trail network criteria provided in that document, the new road segment from Airport Road west to the relocated gate would be designated motorized in the current preliminary road and trail network<sup>1</sup>. The road segment west of the relocated gate that provides access to Summit Lake would remain non-motorized, however; motorized use for administrative purposes (e.g. fish stocking, fire access, etc.) would be allowed. The

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<sup>1</sup> See section **III.J Travel Management** for more information regarding the preliminary road/trail network.  
*Curtz Lake Interpretive Trail and Trailhead Environmental Analysis*  
November, 2009

interpretive trail identified in the proposed action would be designated non-motorized in the current preliminary road and trail network (see Attachment D).

#### **MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**

Revegetation efforts would be monitored for success and for possible invasive/non-native plant species introduction. Seasonal monitoring of the erosion control devices efforts will determine the possible replacement and eventual removal of such devices. Observations would be documented with photographs, written report(s) and Global Positioning System (GPS) data. Future monitoring may indicate a need to provide additional interpretive and resource related messages along the proposed trail and access road. Signs may range from plastic markers to small (2' x 3') panels supported by a 4"x 4" wooden post.

Recreation use monitoring would entail conducting visitor use counts and profiles on both peak and non peak periods including the day of the week and season. These observations would be made by agency personnel, volunteers and visitor use trail logs. Collected data would be entered into the Recreation Management Information System on an annual basis.

#### **ALTERNATIVE**

##### **NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Under the *No Action Alternative* the proposed interpretive trail, parking and access improvements would not be constructed. The existing trailhead, trail and road system would remain in place.

### **III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

This chapter identifies and describes the current condition and trend of elements or resources in the human environment which may be affected by the Proposed Action or Alternatives and the environmental consequences or effects of the action(s).

#### **SCOPING AND ISSUE IDENTIFICATION**

Internal scoping was conducted at the SFFO Interdisciplinary Meeting on March 2, 2009. The following issues were identified through this internal scoping process:

- Potential impacts to:
  - i. riparian/water quality due to construction of road and trail near Curtz Lake;
  - ii. soils and vegetation due to proposed construction of road and trail;
  - iii. recreation, and public health and safety;
  - iv. visual resources;
  - v. travel management
- Native American religious concerns

Internal scoping identified the following entities to be notified:

- Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Cal –Trans
- Alpine County

- Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California; Hung-A-Lel-Ti Tribe
- Private Landowners (2)
- Local School Districts

## PROPOSED ACTION

### General Setting

The Curtz Lake Environmental Study Area is situated within ICRL directly off of Airport Road; a paved road that provides main access to Indian Creek Reservoir and related BLM lands. Completed during the summer of 1972 by the Youth Conservation Corp and the BLM, the CLESA is a highly diversified natural area where natural environmental processes can be observed. Designed for use by the general public and school groups, the existing study area consists of three connecting self-guiding interpretive trails (vegetative, soil-geology and aquatic) and a parking area.

Another parking area at Curtz Lake serves as an intersecting trailhead for the main trail system in the area. The Curtz Lake trailhead provides direct access to Summit Lake and the East Fork of the Carson River, making it an integral component of the overall recreation framework for ICRL. A control access gate exists on the Summit Lake Trail that precludes vehicle access to the north.

### SUPPLEMENTAL AUTHORITIES

Appendix 1 of BLM's NEPA Handbook (H-1790-1) identifies Supplemental Authorities that are subject to requirements specified by statute or executive order and must be considered in all BLM environmental documents. The table below lists the Supplemental Authorities and their status in the project area. Supplemental Authorities that may be affected by the Proposed Action are further described in this EA. *Present/May Be Affected must be carried forward in the document.*

Supplemental Authority*	Not Present**	Present/Not Affected	Present/May Be Affected***	Rationale
Air Quality			X	Carried through EA.
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	X			Resource is not present.
Cultural Resources		X		The entire area of potential effect from the Proposed Action has been inventoried at an intensive level for the presence/absence of cultural resources. As a result of these investigations (Lennon 2001; Carter 2009) some cultural resources are known within the areas of Proposed Action. However, the Proposed Action will avoid any and all resources inventoried and evaluated as eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.
Environmental Justice	X			Resource is not present.
Farm Lands (prime or unique)	X			Resource is not present.



Forests and rangelands (HFRA Projects Only)	X			Project does not meet HFRA criteria.
Human Health and Safety ( Herbicide Projects)	X			Not an herbicide project.
Floodplains	X			Resource is not present.
Invasive, Nonnative and Noxious Species		X		All equipment used in the construction of the road and trail would be pressure washed prior to entering project area. Disturbed areas such as side-cast material would be seeded with native weed-free seed mix.
Migratory Birds			X	Carried through EA.
Native American Religious Concerns			X	Carried through EA.
Threatened and/or Endangered Species	X			The USFWS Nevada's Protected Species (NPS) list was reviewed ( <a href="http://www.fws.gov/nevada/protected-species/nevada-species-list.html">http://www.fws.gov/nevada/protected-species/nevada-species-list.html</a> ). The geographic area covered by the Nevada Fish & Wildlife Office includes part of CA. The only T&E animal species on the NPS list that occurs in Alpine County, CA is the Lahontan cutthroat trout. This species is found in a wide variety of cold-watered habitats including large terminal alkaline lakes (e.g., Pyramid & Walker); alpine lakes (e.g., Lake Tahoe & Independence Lake); slow meandering rivers (e.g., Humboldt River); mountain rivers (e.g., Carson, Truckee, Walker, Marys River); and small headwater tributary streams (e.g., Donner & Prosser Creeks). This species is not present in the project area.
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	X			Resource is not present.
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)			X	Carried through EA.
Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X		Road, trail construction and future recreation activities would occur above the Curtz Lake high water mark. Best management practices would be used in the site design and construction of road and trail features.
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X			Resource is not present.
Wilderness	X			Resource is not present.

*\*See H-1790-1(January 2009) Appendix 1 Supplemental Authorities to be Considered.*

*\*\*Supplemental Authorities determined to be Not Present or Present/Not Affected need not be carried forward or discussed further in the document.*

*\*\*\*Supplemental Authorities determined to be Present/May Be Affected must be carried forward in the document.*

## RESOURCES OR USES OTHER THAN SUPPLEMENTAL AUTHORITIES

The following resources or uses, which are not Supplemental Authorities as defined by BLM's Handbook H-1790-1, are present in the area. BLM specialists have evaluated the potential impact of the Proposed Action on these resources and documented their findings in the table below. Resources or uses that may be affected by the Proposed Action are further described in this EA.

Resource or Issue	Present/Not Affected#	Present/May Be Affected##	Rationale
Soils		X	Carried through EA.
Vegetation		X	Carried through EA.
Recreation		X	Carried through EA.
VRM		X	Carried through EA.
Public Health & Safety		X	Carried through EA.
Travel Management		X	Carried through EA.
BLM Sensitive Species (Animal)		X	Carried through EA.
General Wildlife		X	Carried through EA.

*#Resources or uses determined to be Present/Not Affected need not be carried forward or discussed further in the document.*

*##Resources or uses determined to be Present/May Be Affected must be carried forward in the document.*

## RESOURCES PRESENT AND BROUGHT FORWARD FOR ANALYSIS (All Resources)

The following resources are present in the area and may be affected by the Proposed Action.

### III.A. Air Quality

#### Affected Environment

The Federal government and the State of California's Air Resources Board (ARB) have each established ambient air quality standards for several criteria air pollutants. No monitoring data is available for pollutants in the County. Emission inventory data is estimated annually. Alpine County has good air quality and does not exceed National standards for any criteria pollutants. The ARB makes State area designations for ten criteria pollutants: ozone, suspended particulate matter (PM10), fine suspended particulate matter (PM2.5), carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, sulfates, lead, hydrogen sulfide, and visibility reducing particles. The County exceeds the State standards for suspended particulate matter (PM10).

Sensitive receptors to dust in the project area would be the Curtz Lake trailhead and nearby trails, Airport Road and two residences north of the project area located off Airport Road.

## **Environmental Consequences**

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on air quality of the Proposed Action are expected to be negligible. The Proposed Action would result in a localized short-term effect on air quality in the project vicinity as a result of exhaust and fugitive dust emissions generated by equipment and power tools.

Exhaust - The Proposed Action would have minor adverse effects on air quality through the generation of exhaust emissions from equipment and power tools, such as a grader and water truck. Emissions generated during implementation are individually and cumulatively minor and short term, and would not result in adverse cumulative air quality effects.

Dust - The Proposed Action would have minor adverse effects on air quality through the generation of dust from equipment, such as vehicles and road construction equipment. Equipment would be working on exposed soil and any dust generated would not remain airborne for any length of time. Construction of the road and trail would occur in early spring and/or late fall depending on scheduling. Construction taking place in the spring would benefit from increased soil moisture that would minimize fugitive dust. Fall construction may require dust abatement (water truck).

### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to air quality under the no action alternative.

## **III.B. Migratory Birds**

On January 11, 2001, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13186 (Land Bird Strategic Project) placing emphasis on conservation and management of migratory birds. These species are not protected under the Endangered Species Act, but most are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Management for these species is based on Instruction Memorandum – IM 2008-050 dated December 18, 2007 (BLM 2007).

### **Affected environment**

Although located in California, the project area's bird habitats most closely resemble the Intermountain West Avifaunal Biome described by Partners in Flight (PIF) (Beidleman 2000). The Intermountain West Biome is the center of distribution for many western birds and over half of the biome's Species of Continental Importance have 75% or more of their population here. Many breeding species from this biome migrate to winter in central and western Mexico or in the Southwestern biome.

The National Audubon Society has established a program for identifying areas of importance to migratory birds. The presence of an IBA would indicate unusually large numbers of birds, greater species diversity, and the potential for unusual species sightings. There are no Important Bird Areas (IBA) or identified important wintering areas in the project area (McIvor 2005).

According to Nevada's Wildlife Action Plan (WAP), Nevada consists of 27 key habitats (Wildlife Action Plan Team 2006). The project area occurs largely in the 'Sierra Conifer Forests and Woodlands' key habitat type. The 'Lakes and Reservoirs' key habitat is represented by Curtz Lake. See part III. L. (pg 14) for a more thorough description of habitats in the project area. The migratory species of concern that occur or are likely to occur in the project area are given in the table below (BLM 2007). Different

elements of the key habitats are of importance to different species of migratory birds and elements are noted in the table.

Migratory species of concern that occur or are likely to occur in the project area:

Common Name	Scientific Name	Key Habitat <sub>1</sub>	Habitat element	Use
American avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	L & R	Shoreline/Beach	Nesting, foraging
California spotted owl	<i>Strix occidentalis occidentalis</i>	F & W	Old growth, Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Flammulated owl	<i>Otus flammeolus</i>	F & W	Old growth, Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Lewis's woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	F & W	Disturbance (fire, insect outbreaks create suitable conditions), Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Long-billed curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	L & R	Shoreline/Beach	Nesting, foraging
Northern goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	F & W	Overstory, Old growth	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Olive-sided flycatcher	<i>Contopus cooperi</i>	F & W	Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	L & R	Cliffs	Nesting, roosting
Snowy plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	L & R	Shoreline/Beach	Nesting, foraging
White-headed woodpecker	<i>Picoides albolarvatus</i>	F & W	Old growth, Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>	L & R	Shoreline/Beach	Nesting, foraging
Williamson's sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus thyroideus</i>	F & W	Riparian/Wet meadow	Foraging, cover

<sub>1</sub> L & R = 'Lakes and Reservoirs' key habitat, F & W = 'Sierra Conifer Forests and Woodlands' key habitat

## **Environmental Consequences**

### *Proposed Action*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on migratory birds are expected to be negligible and discountable. The project area is very small (<2 acres) and only 6-8 second growth pines, 1-2 snags if deemed a safety hazard, and a small amount of shrubs, forbs, and grasses would be displaced by the realignment of the access road and construction of new trail and parking area. There are no nests in any of the trees or snags to be removed and none of them are marked with holes that would be used by cavity nesting species. The slight loss of potential habitat would be likely offset by the reclamation of a portion of the existing trail and old parking lot; these are to be obliterated and returned to natural site conditions. Reclamation involves recontouring and seeding with a native weed-free seed mix. While there could be potential short-term affects to the water quality of Curtz Lake from sediment transport due to surface disturbance from construction of the road, trail, the lake would be largely unaffected by the proposed project. Proposed activities would occur above the Curtz Lake high water mark and best management practices would be used for site design and construction. The lake shoreline and vegetation would not be disturbed and there would be no loss of wetland habitat. Proposed activities would not affect riparian habitat, old growth, or cliff habitat. Insect and small mammal prey would remain abundant. Overall, some individual birds may be displaced in the short-term by shifting spatially in response to disturbance during project implementation, but local populations would remain unaffected.

### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to migratory birds under the no action alternative.

## **III.C. Native American Religious Concerns**

### **Affected Environment**

Federal legislation, regulations, and executive orders dictate that federal agencies must consider the repercussion of their actions when Native American traditions and religious practices are involved. Therefore, the BLM must make efforts to identify locations having traditional cultural or religious values to Native Americans and ensure that land management actions do not unduly or unnecessarily burden the pursuit of traditional religion or life ways by inadvertently damaging important locations or hinder access to them.

Cultural and archaeological resources are protected under a number of federal laws, regulations, and executive orders, including the National Historic Preservation Act of 1978, as amended; the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979; as amended; the FLPMA; and others. Therefore, if any cultural properties, items, or artifacts (e.g. stone tools or projectile points) are encountered during the activities associated with improving the Curtz Lake trailhead, BLM would ensure that such items are not collected by their employees or contractors.

Curtz Lake lies within the ethnographic territory of the Hung-A-Lel-Ti Band of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California (Washoe). The Hung-A-Lel-Ti mainly inhabited Indian Creek and the western fork of the Carson River valleys and canyons (Carter 2009). Washoe people continue to live on reservation lands in the Indian Creek Valley, on allotments in the southern Pine Nut Range, and elsewhere in the region. Several tribal families in the region are familiar with the immediate area of the Indian Creek

reservoir and Curtz Lake, and maintain an interest in access to the land, water, plants, animals, and other resources.

Per federal law and regulations, and in addition to requiring a cultural resources inventory (Lennon 2001; Carter 2009) of the Proposed Action area of potential effect (APE), the BLM consulted with the Washoe Tribe about their concerns for tribal access and resources that may be present. They expressed a concern for the archaeological resources in the immediate area, in general, and for the resources encountered during the inventory of the APE. A copy of proposal maps and other data informing the Tribe of the Proposed Action was provided to the Washoe Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), Darrel Cruz, by BLM on March 2, 2009. Staff-to-staff discussions of the area continued, and results of the new cultural resources inventory (Carter 2009) was discussed between BLM Lead Archaeologist Jim Carter and the Washoe THPO on April 15, 2009. At this time, the Washoe Tribe is satisfied that specific cultural resources would be avoided by all Proposed Actions, and that the project will not generally affect their access and concerns. Consultation between the Washoe Tribe and the BLM is ongoing.

### **Environmental Consequences**

#### *Proposed Action*

Although consultation with the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California is ongoing and general concerns for access and protection of cultural and natural resources have been expressed by Tribes, no specific concerns with the Curtz Lake Proposed Action have been identified to date. All pertinent documentation of the identified cultural resources and construction activities within the Curtz Lake area proposed by the BLM has been considered in this EA. BLM has committed to avoidance of and protection of all cultural resources located within or near the Curtz Lake project area.

#### *No Action Alternative*

Under the no action alternative no potential to effect cultural values or Native American concerns would occur.

### **III.D. Water Quality**

#### **Affected Environment**

The State of California is responsible for managing water quality under the federal Clean Water Act, and has created regional boards to accomplish water quality goals in the state. The project units fall within lands administered by the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (LRWQCB).

The LRWQCB (1) designates beneficial uses for individual water bodies, (2) establishes water quality objectives to achieve those uses, and (3) conducts assessments to determine whether the objectives are being met. Water quality objectives are written as narratives and numeric criteria, and they address physical, chemical, and biological parameters. Water quality objectives can pertain to all surface waters, individual water bodies, or specific designated uses (LRWQCB, 2005).

The LRWQCB (2005) has established water quality objectives for various wetlands and “minor surface waters,” which include Curtz and Summit lakes. In addition, specific beneficial uses and associated water quality objectives have been established for the East Fork Carson River, Indian Creek Reservoir, Millberry Creek, and Stevens Lake.

When a water body does not meet water quality standards, the LRWQCB may establish a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the pollutant<sup>2</sup>. A TMDL for total phosphorus was established for Indian Creek Reservoir because the reservoir became eutrophic in the 1970s (LRWQCB, 2002a). Only nonpoint sources of total phosphorous have been identified, and internal sources from bed sediments make up about 76 percent of the current load. External sources, primarily direct surface runoff and tributary inflow along with a small amount of precipitation, comprise the remaining 24 percent. Public lands in the watershed could contribute external sources of total phosphorous, mainly through sedimentation to the reservoir. Animal and human waste products are also potential sources (Unsicker and Schembri, 2001).

### **Environmental Consequences**

#### *Proposed Action*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on water quality of the Proposed Action are expected to be negligible. Short-term adverse impacts to Curtz Lake's water quality are possible due to surface disturbance associated with road and trail construction. Removing vegetation would expose soils to erosion, and sediment could be transported to the water body during runoff events. Travel by vehicles, equipment and hikers could also loosen soil, making it more susceptible to erosion. These would be short duration effects; however, as the potential for water quality impacts would also be minimized by certain project design features and by implementing best management practices (BMPs).

Design features would include: (1) minimizing unnecessary surface disturbance during construction phase; (2) install waddles and/or other erosion control devices; (3) recontour and seed exposed non-tread surface disturbances with native weed-free seed mix; (4) gravel road surface, and (5) design/construct trails using accepted design standards. These design features would protect water quality by minimizing surface disturbance, reducing erosion, and capturing sediment before it is transported to the water body.

#### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to water quality under the no action alternative.

### **III.E. Soils**

#### **Affected Environment**

The soils in the project area above Curtz Lake's twenty year high water mark can be generally classified in the Bly Variant-Stemilt Variant association. Runoff is rated as medium, and the hazard of water erosion is slight to medium.

### **Environmental Consequences**

#### *Proposed Action*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on soils of the Proposed Action are expected to be negligible. The proposed project would result minimal surface disturbance and a limited amount of reduced vegetative cover. In some situations these factors could expose bare soil to the effects of wind

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<sup>2</sup> By definition, the TMDL of a pollutant is the sum of all point and nonpoint sources of the pollutant plus a margin of safety that could be allowed while still allowing the standard to be attained. Detailed information on the total phosphorous TMDL for Indian Creek Reservoir can be found at <[http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/lahontan/TMDL/Indian\\_Ck\\_Res/Indian\\_Ck\\_Res\\_Index.htm](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/lahontan/TMDL/Indian_Ck_Res/Indian_Ck_Res_Index.htm)>.

and water and lead to accelerated soil erosion. The potential for accelerated soil erosion rates depends on factors such as soil type, steepness of slope, exposure to high volumes of precipitation or high wind speeds, and the degree of vegetative cover reduction.

In any case, revegetation of bare mineral soil in the project area, where applicable, is expected to occur relatively rapidly with reseeding. This would limit the potential for accelerated soil erosion impacts to the short-term. Since the project area is primarily located on relatively gentle slopes, the soil types are only slight to moderately susceptible to erosion. Areas of bare soil created by the project would not be large or continuous, and appropriate post treatment soil erosion control measures would be implemented where needed. Soil erosion is not expected to increase substantially in the project area.

#### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to soils under the no action alternative.

### **III.F. Vegetation**

#### **Affected Environment**

The low elevation eastern Sierra Nevada is a unique transition zone where the Sierra Nevada ecoregion overlaps with the Great Basin ecoregion. As a result we see a mixing of the species from each ecoregion within this transition zone. The vegetation on BLM land in Alpine County is typical of this transition zone and consists of a diverse mix of Jeffrey pine, white fir, pinyon pine, incense cedar, Sierra juniper, mountain mahogany, bitterbrush, manzanita, ceanothus sp., sagebrush, grasses and forbs. As hard discrete boundaries between ecological communities are rare, the presence of pinyon pine and white fir along the eastern Sierra Nevada is an important and natural component of the vegetation communities.

Cheatgrass is an annual exotic species that may be present wherever there has been ground disturbance. In some parts of the country, cheatgrass has come to dominate large areas where native flora has been lost in plant communities. In Alpine County, however, composition of plant communities is varied enough that cheatgrass monocultures have not developed. It has increased on a few sites after fires in recent years, but enough other native species are present there to reduce the likelihood of large areas dominated by cheatgrass.

In 1984-85 wildfires burned nearly 19,000 acres of forest and woodland east of Indian Creek Reservoir. The high intensity of these wildfires was due to the unhealthy condition of the forest. Fire suppression policies of the past did not allow for natural, reoccurring low intensity fires that maintain forest health. Without natural fire the forest became overgrown and this high density led to pests and disease.

As a result of these catastrophic fires, the BLM began to manage vegetation to prevent future wildfires from causing such widespread damage. Recently, the BLM has completed several vegetative fuel treatments in and around the Curtz Lake area. These scheduled treatments reduce fire hazard fuels, remove dead and dying trees, and thin dense groups of trees vulnerable to fire, insects, and disease.

#### **Environmental Consequences**

##### *Proposed Action*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on vegetation of the Proposed Action are expected to be negligible. Depending on final design, it is estimated that 2-3 pinon trees and 6-9 Jeffrey pine trees,



and a small amount of shrubs, forbs, and grasses would be displaced by the construction of the road realignment, trail and parking area. This loss in vegetation would be offset somewhat by the return of native plants on the existing trail and parking areas that are proposed to be obliterated and returned to natural site conditions.

A long-term beneficial effect that could result from the proposed action would be that public environmental awareness will increase. The public will therefore be better informed and able to support progressive resource management, which will in turn benefit the ecosystem and increase resource values.

#### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to vegetation under the no action alternative.

### **III.G. Recreation**

#### **Affected Environment**

Located off Airport Road, the Curtz Lake Environmental Study Area was completed during the summer of 1973 by the Youth Conservation Corp and the BLM. Designed for use by the general public and school groups, the study area consists of three connecting self-guiding thematic interpretive single-track trails and a parking area. The trail, parking, interpretive themes and related signs are over 30 years old and are in need of significant updates and redesign. Historically, the interpretive trail has received most of its use during the spring and fall months. Summer use is typically low to moderate. There are three interpretive trail crossings on Airport Road.

The Curtz Lake trailhead provides parking and trail access to Summit Lake and the East Fork of the Carson River. The trails support mainly hiking and fishing access. Over the years various vegetative treatments have occurred in the area in an effort to reduce fuel loading and to improve forest health.

#### **Environmental Consequences**

##### *Proposed Action*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on recreation of the Proposed Action are expected to be negligible. The sounds of heavy equipment and vehicles related to the proposed construction would be audible to the public in the vicinity of the Curtz Lake area while work is being performed. However, construction would primarily take place in the summer months when school is out and fishing at Summit Lake is typically below average. Some recreation opportunities, most notably hiking and fishing may be compromised for a short period of time during the construction phase of this project.

Completion of the project would significantly enhance and increase hiking, fishing and interpretive based recreation opportunities. To a limited degree, the proposed action would increase accessibility by providing opportunities for the disabled to experience the area.

##### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to recreation under the no action alternative, however; recreation opportunities for enhanced public access would not be realized.

### **III.H. Visual Resources**

#### **Affected Environment**

The proposed project area is within BLM Class II Visual Resource Management (VRM) zone. A VRM Class II means that change in the landscape due to management activities can be visible but does not attract attention. VRM Class II zones within the project area include the viewscape around Curtz and Summit Lakes. Major developments within or in proximity to the Class II areas include paved and unpaved roads, the existing Curtz Lake trailhead parking area and related trails, and several vegetative fuel treatments. A portion of the project area is within the viewing foreground of travelers on Airport Road.

#### **Environmental Consequences**

##### *Proposed Action*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on visual resources of the Proposed Action are expected to be negligible. Short term impacts to scenic quality, as viewed from Airport Road, would result from activities related to the road and apron construction off Airport Road. Construction activities would introduce temporary visual detractions such as construction equipment, support vehicles and personnel, vehicle tracks, fugitive dust, and other visible effects associated with the proposed road construction. These temporary visual changes could be noticeable but would not dominate the view by casual observers. Disruptions to the existing viewscape would be minimal due to the relative small size of the project area.

Road, trailhead and trail construction near Curtz Lake would introduce short term visual impacts to line, color, tone and texture. The road cut and fill slopes would create visible lines as viewed from Airport Road and the main trail. Exposed soils on road cut and fill slopes would be lighter and dissociative from surrounding soils, colors and tones. Application of best management practices such as soil erosion waddles would introduce new visual line(s) into the setting. Road base applied to tread surfaces would introduce a courser texture than native soils.

Visual impacts resulting from construction of the trailhead parking area and trails would introduce new lines, color and texture. Since these features are located mostly out of sight from Airport Road, they would be seen primarily by hikers and users of the trailhead.

The disruptions to the altered viewscape would diminish or lessen with time. Cut and fill slopes would soften and become less visible with the recovery of native plants. Impacts to color and tone related to the application of road base should be minimal since an earth tone road base would be utilized. Over time, and as determined through monitoring, erosion control devices would be removed. An initial benefit to the viewshed is the relocation of the existing parking area out of view from Airport Road. The proposed activity would meet the criterion of Class II zone without undue impairment.

##### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to visual resources under the no action alternative.

### **III.I. Public Health & Safety**

#### **Affected Environment**

The existing interpretive trail and related trailhead, themes, signs and parking area are over 30 years old and are in need of significant updates and redesign. The Curtz Lake Trailhead is poorly designed and located and also presents public health and safety concerns. Vehicle access points to both parking areas

are located where road line-of sight distances are poor. The existing interpretive trail parking area is too small to safely accommodate school bus parking, loading and unloading. Three Airport Road pedestrian road crossings have inadequate line-of-sight distances and are unmarked. A segment of interpretive trail segment appears to be located on private land. The current interpretive trail alignment poses safety concerns due to poorly designed road crossings and/or fluctuating site conditions. For example, during wet seasons it is not uncommon for portions of the existing “aquatic” trail to be under water.

### **Environmental Consequences**

#### *Proposed Action*

The proposed action would benefit public health and safety by enhancing the safety, accessibility and quality recreation and interpretive opportunities to the public. Line-of-sight distances on Airport Road would be increased and pedestrian road crossings associated with the interpretive trail would be eliminated. The project would also refine interpretive information and themes for the target audience (school groups), consolidate parking and trailhead function in one area, and provide an element of convenience to the users by upgrading the access road and by relocating parking to a shaded area away from Airport Road traffic.

#### *No Action Alternative*

Under the no action alternative potential impacts to public health and safety in the area would not occur, however; existing facilities would remain in place and continue to compromise public health and safety.

### **III.J. Travel Management**

#### **Affected Environment**

Approximately 70 miles of roads, primitive roads, and trails exist on BLM managed lands in Alpine County. Road types range from paved to unimproved two track. Types of vehicle use range from recreational vehicles at Indian Creek Campground to all terrain vehicles (ATVs) in the back country. Airport Road provides main access into the Indian Creek Recreation Lands. This highway is authorized on public land by a right-of-way<sup>3</sup> to California Department of Transportation.

In 2007 the ACRMPA established a preliminary road and trail network that incorporated several primary roads and trails into the network, including the non-motorized trail segments leading from Curtz Lake Trailhead to the East Fork of the Carson River and Summit Lake. The plan amendment also established factors<sup>4</sup> to be used for adding additional roads and trail into the network, and identified the need for a road inventory to be completed in order to proceed with this process. In the fall of 2007 a road and trail inventory was completed on all BLM managed lands in Alpine County.

Existing trail types in the Curtz Lake project area are primarily nonmotorized single track and used predominantly by hikers. The Curtz Lake Trailhead provides access to a non-motorized trail system that provides connectivity to the East Fork of the Carson River, Summit Lake and Indian Creek Reservoir. A gate at the trailhead parking area restricts motorized access to Summit Lake to administrative use.

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<sup>3</sup> BLM case file CAS – 3906

<sup>4</sup> Road, primitive road, or trail densities; soil erosion; water quality; existing and proposed utility and access rights-of-way; cultural resources; threatened and endangered plants and animals; invasive non-native plants and noxious weeds; priority species and habitats.

## **Environmental Consequences**

### *Proposed Action*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on travel management of the Proposed Action are expected to be minor. Although the proposed action would eliminate all non-motorized trail (existing interpretive trail) south of Airport Road, this loss in travel routes would be offset with the creation of new non-motorized trails. Subsequently, road and trail density in this area would not significantly change. The relocation of the Curtz Lake Trailhead and interpretive trail system would maintain existing connectivity to Summit Lake and the East Fork of the Carson River trails.

Design of the road apron, road signs and cut bank associated to Airport Road would adhere to California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) and/or Alpine County road standards. If required, an encroachment permit would be acquired from CALTRANS.

The proposed action would incorporate new road and trail segments into the preliminary network, and change existing preliminary network designations on certain road and trail segments. Existing motorized road access would be expanded to the relocated gate, and two miles of newly constructed non-motorized trail would be added to the trail system. Specifically, the new road segment from Airport Road west to the relocated gate would be designated motorized in the current preliminary road and trail network. The road segment west of the relocated gate that provides access to Summit Lake would remain non-motorized, however; motorized use for administrative purposes (e.g. fish stocking, fire access, etc.) would be allowed. The interpretive trail identified in the proposed action would be designated non-motorized in the current preliminary road and trail network.

### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to travel management under the no action alternative.

## **III. K. BLM Sensitive Species**

BLM Manual 6840 – Special Status Species Management, establishes policy for management Bureau sensitive species which are found on BLM-administered lands (BLM 2008). Species designated as Bureau sensitive must be native species found on BLM-administered lands for which the BLM has the capability to significantly affect the conservation status of the species through management and either:

1) there is information that a species has recently undergone, is undergoing, or is predicted to undergo a downward trend such that the viability of the species or a distinct population segment of the species is at risk across all or a significant portion of the species range; or 2) the species depends on ecological refugia or specialized or unique habitats on BLM-administered lands, and there is evidence that such areas are threatened with alteration such that the continued viability of the species in that area would be at risk (BLM 2008).

## **Affected Environment**

According to Nevada's Wildlife Action Plan (WAP), Nevada consists of 27 key habitats (Wildlife Action Plan Team 2006). The project area occurs largely in the 'Sierra Conifer Forests and Woodlands' key habitat type. The 'Lakes and Reservoirs' key habitat is represented by Curtz Lake. See part III. L. (pg 14) for a more thorough description of habitats in the project area. Because the project area is located in Alpine County, California, but is administered by the BLM in Nevada, both the Nevada and California sensitive species lists apply to the project area. The BLM sensitive animal species that occur or are likely

to occur in the project area are given in the table below (BLM 2003, BLM 2004). Different elements of the key habitats are of importance to different sensitive species and elements are noted in the table. Species for which key habitat information is missing are species not discussed in the Nevada WAP.

Nevada and California BLM sensitive species that occur or are likely to occur in the project area:

Common Name	Scientific Name	Key Habitat <sub>1</sub>	Habitat element	Use
Bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	F & W	Old growth	Nesting, roosting
Big brown bat	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>			
Black tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	L & R	Open water, Tule/Marsh fringe	Foraging, nesting, resting
California floater	<i>Anodonta californiensis</i>	L & R	Aquatic	Tied to water source for part or all of life history
California spotted owl	<i>Strix occidentalis occidentalis</i>	F & W	Old growth, Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Cooper's hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	F & W	Second growth	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Fisher	<i>Martes pennanti</i>		Mature habitat, high canopy closure, large snags and large woody debris, riparian areas	
Flammulated owl	<i>Otus flammeolus</i>	F & W	Old growth, Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Great gray owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>			
Lewis's woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	F & W	Disturbance (fire, insect outbreaks create suitable conditions), Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Little brown myotis	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	L & R	Open water	Foraging
Long-billed curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	L & R	Shoreline/Beach	Foraging, nesting
Long-eared myotis	<i>Myotis evotis</i>	F & W	Old growth, Snags/Broken tops/Cavities	Foraging, nesting, roosting
Long-eared owl	<i>Asio otus</i>			
Long-legged myotis	<i>Myotis volans</i>			
Mono checkerspot	<i>Euphydryas editha monoensis</i>			
Mountain quail	<i>Oreortyx pictus</i>	F & W	Shrub and herbaceous	Foraging, cover

			cover	
Mountain yellow-legged frog	<i>Rana mucosa</i>	L & R	Natural/Terminal lakes, Montane Pools	Tied to water source for life history requirements
Northern goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	F & W	Overstory, Old growth	Nesting, roosting, foraging
Northern leopard frog	<i>Rana pipiens</i>	L & R	Natural/Terminal lakes, Montane pools	Tied to water source for life history requirements
Pallid bat	<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>			
Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	L & R	Cliffs	Nesting, roosting
Sierra alligator lizard	<i>Elgaria coerulea palmeri</i>	F & W	Shrub and herbaceous cover	Foraging, cover
Sierra Nevada red fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes necator</i>	F & W	Prey populations	Feeds on species in this habitat
Silver-haired bat	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>			
Snowy plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	L & R	Shoreline/Beach	Foraging, nesting
Yuma myotis	<i>Myotis yumanensis</i>			

<sup>1</sup> L & R = 'Lakes and Reservoirs' key habitat, F & W = 'Sierra Conifer Forests and Woodlands' key habitat

## Environmental Consequences

### Proposed Action

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on sensitive species are expected to be negligible and discountable. The project area is very small (<2 acres), and only 6-8 second growth pines, 1-2 snags if deemed a safety hazard, and a small amount of shrubs, forbs, and grasses would be displaced by the realignment of the access road and construction of new trail and parking area. There are no nests in any of the trees or snags to be removed, and none of them are marked with holes that would be used by cavity nesting species. The slight loss of potential habitat would likely be offset by the reclamation of a portion of the existing trail and old parking lot; these are to be obliterated and returned to natural site conditions. Reclamation involves recontouring and seeding with a native weed-free seed mix. While there could be potential short-term affects to the water quality of Curtz Lake from sediment transport due to surface disturbance from construction of the road, trail, the lake would be largely unaffected by the proposed project. Proposed activities would occur above the Curtz Lake high water mark and best management practices would be used for site design and construction. The lake shoreline and vegetation would not be disturbed and there would be no loss of wetland habitat. Ducks and/or shorebirds that might use Curtz as a stopover likely won't be affected by the changes from the proposed action after treatment. Proposed activities would not affect riparian habitat, old growth, or cliff habitat. Sensitive species that use the project area for foraging (i.e. bats, raptors) would continue to find abundant insect and small mammal prey. Overall, some individual sensitive animals may be displaced in the short-term by shifting spatially in response to disturbance during project implementation, but local populations would remain unaffected.

### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to sensitive species under the no action alternative.

## **III. L. General Wildlife**

### **Affected Environment**

Primarily two key habitats occur with the project area as described in the Nevada Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) (Wildlife Action Plan Team 2006). The project area occurs largely in the 'Sierra Conifer Forests and Woodlands' key habitat type which is comprised of a diverse assemblage of ecological systems that range from the Sierra Nevada foothills up to ridges and rocky slopes around timberline. The Sierra Nevada foothills represent a unique transitional zone between the Sierra Nevada and Great Basin ecoregions. Mixed conifer typifies the lower elevations. Jeffrey pine forests and woodlands, with inclusions of pinyon pine, juniper, incense cedar, mountain mahogany, and white fir, are found on the warm, xeric sites of the foothills. Common shrub species include antelope bitterbrush, rabbitbrush, sagebrush, greenleaf manzanita, and snowberry. Needlegrass and pennyroyal are common herbaceous species. Small areas of montane meadows are interspersed throughout this habitat type. Wildlife species associated with this habitat include blue grouse, montane shrew, Steller's jay, northern pygmy owl, and marten. The 'Lakes and Reservoirs' key habitat is represented by Curtz Lake, a small pond in the project area that often dries in summer and supports emergent vegetation and a high quality, late seral ephemerally wet meadow. Wildlife species associated with this habitat include gulls, grebes, sandpipers, fish species, and western pond turtle.

On a landscape scale, the eastern Sierra Nevada conifer forest is a unique strip of habitat surrounded by pinyon-juniper woodlands in the Great Basin and oak savannahs in California. On a watershed scale, the project area occurs in largely even-aged, mature conifer forest. In general, even-aged forests do not provide for a high diversity of wildlife species. High species diversity results from a landscape that has non-forest, young, mature, and old growth inclusions. Under current conditions, some conifer forest is likely to convert to woodlands causing a decline in conifer dependent species.

The larger landscape that contains the general project area is important to mule deer. The Carson River Deer Herd uses the area at least part of the year. Winter and summer ranges as well as migration corridors have been identified in the area. The deer herd is considered stable to declining due in part to fire exclusion (<http://www.dfg.ca.gov>). Much of the summer and winter ranges in the area are being taken over by forest and woodland species due to a lack of maintenance by periodic fire. Mountain lions can be found in any habitat used by deer.

No pronghorn or bighorn sheep occur in the general project area.

Black bears are common around the project area. Small caves, large logs, and other special features are used for dens and winter hibernation although in an open winter bears may hibernate for only a short time or not at all. Bears are dependent on having a steady source of roots, insects, and small mammals found in open habitats for food. Forests and woodlands are expanding into such areas due in part to lack of fire.

Wild turkeys occur in the general project area, but no roosting or gobbling sites have been identified. Jeffrey pine is key habitat and open meadows for gobbling sites are crucial to successful reproduction ([www.natureserve.com](http://www.natureserve.com)). The Jeffrey pine-Pinyon juniper interface is important habitat when found on a ridgeline, especially when near water. Splayed top pines are used for roosting.

Mountain quail are present in the area and recent wet years have produced good numbers in montane habitats ([www.dfg.ca.gov](http://www.dfg.ca.gov)). These birds favor riparian vegetation adjacent to shrub lands.

## **Environmental Consequences**

### *Proposed Action*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on general wildlife species are expected to be negligible and discountable. The project area is very small (<2 acres), and only 6-8 second growth pines, 1-2 snags if deemed a safety hazard, and a small amount of shrubs, forbs, and grasses would be displaced by the realignment of the access road and construction of new trail and parking area. There are no nests in any of the trees or snags to be removed, and none of them are marked with holes that would be used by cavity nesting species. The slight loss of potential habitat would likely be offset by the reclamation of a portion of the existing trail and old parking lot; these are to be obliterated and returned to natural site conditions. Reclamation involves recontouring and seeding with a native weed-free seed mix. While there could be potential short-term affects to the water quality of Curtz Lake from sediment transport due to surface disturbance from construction of the road, trail, the lake would be largely unaffected by the proposed project. Proposed activities would occur above the Curtz Lake high water mark and best management practices would be used for site design and construction. The lake shoreline and vegetation would not be disturbed and there would be no loss of wetland habitat. Proposed activities would not affect riparian vegetation, old growth, or dry meadows. Species making use of the project area for foraging would continue to find good sources of food. Deer, mountain lions, bear, turkey, and quail would be minimally impacted by the proposed activities. Overall, some individual animals may be displaced in the short-term by shifting spatially in response to disturbance during project implementation, but local populations would remain unaffected.

### *No Action Alternative*

There would be no impacts to general wildlife habitat under the no action alternative.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### **No Action Alternative**

The description of the Affected Environment for the No Action alternative would be the same as that for the Proposed Action.

## **CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

All resource values have been evaluated for cumulative impacts. It has been determined that cumulative impacts would be negligible as a result of implementation of the Proposed Action or Alternatives. The re-development and improvement of existing recreation facilities at Curt Lake would provide similar facilities and recreation opportunities consistent with the management direction in the Indian Creek Recreation Lands.



## MONITORING

The monitoring described in the Proposed Action is sufficient for this action.

## IV. PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

### LIST OF PREPARERS

#### Bureau of Land Management

NAME	TITLE	PROJECT EXPERTISE
Arthur Callan	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Visual Resources, Travel Management, Public Health & Safety
Pilar Ziegler	Wildlife Biologist	T&E Species (wildlife), General Wildlife, Migratory Birds
Dean Tonenna	Botanist	Noxious Weeds, T&E Species (plants), Vegetation
Jim Carter	Archaeologist	Cultural, Historic, Native American Consultation
Jim Schroeder	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Wetlands, Soils, Air Quality
JoAnn Hufnagle	Realty Specialist	Lands & Realty
Steep Weiss	Forester	Vegetation
Desna Young	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	NEPA

### PERSONS, GROUPS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED

NAME	AGENCY	PROJECT EXPERTISE
Darrel Cruz	Washoe Tribe	Native American Consultation
Mark DeMaio	Alpine Co. Public Works Dept.	Engineering

## IV. APPENDICES OR ATTACHMENTS

### References

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## **Attachments**

Attachment A (Project Location Map)

Attachment B (Existing Facilities Map; or No Action Alternative)

Attachment C (Proposed Action Map)

Attachment D (Road/Trail Designations)

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
for  
Curtz Lake Interpretive Trail and Trailhead  
Environmental Assessment: DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2009-0021

**INTRODUCTION**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Sierra Front Field Office (SFFO) proposes to design, construct and maintain an access road, trailhead, and an interpretive trail off Airport Road adjacent to Curtz Lake. The new facilities would replace similar facilities in the area that are outdated and poorly designed. This project would refine the interpretive program, consolidate parking and trailhead function and incorporate project road and trails into an existing road and trail network.

The preliminary EA was issued on October 10, 2009 to fifteen separate entities for public comment. One verbal and two written responses were received within the formal comment period that ended October 27, 2009. Two written responses were received a few days after the comment period formally ended. Regardless, all written responses were documented in the Administrative Record and, where applicable, substantive comments addressed in the Final EA.

**PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY** The proposed action and alternatives are in conformance and are consistent with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001) and the Alpine County Resource Management Plan Amendment (2007).

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION**

Based on the analysis of the Curtz Lake Interpretive Trail and Trailhead environmental assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2009-0021, I have determined that the action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

**Context:**

This American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009) project has been brought forward by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Sierra Front Field Office (SFFO) to address public health and safety concerns at Curtz Lake Environmental Study Area and Curt Lake Trailhead. The existing Curtz Lake recreation facility is located within an established recreation area known as the Indian Creek Recreation Lands (1977). The BLM SFFO manages approximately 18,680 acres of public land in Alpine County, California.

**Intensity:**

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulation includes the following ten considerations for evaluating intensity:

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.* None of the environmental effects discussed in the EA are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed any known threshold of significance. The proposed action would produce beneficial impacts to public health and safety by improving site conditions and accessibility.

2) *The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.* The proposed action would re-develop and improve existing recreation based facilities at Curtz Lake. The project will provide safe, accessible, quality recreation and interpretive opportunities to the public. The need for the proposed action is based primarily on public health and safety concerns related to existing access road, trail and trailhead layout and design. Two of the three existing pedestrian road crossings would be eliminated from the design.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.* Although the area is highly diversified and an exceptional setting for environmental interpretation, there are no unique characteristics in proximity to the project area.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.* The effects of the proposed action on the human or natural environment were determined to be negligible. The construction of recreation based facilities within designated recreation lands is not expected to be highly controversial.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The proposed action is not unique nor does it involve unknown risks. A similar interpretive facility has existed and functioned adequately at Curtz Lake since the mid 1970's.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or presents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* The desire to enhance and protect recreation values and natural resources has guided management actions on BLM lands in Alpine County since the late 1960's. The proposed action is to re-develop and improve existing recreation facilities within an established recreation area.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* All resource values were evaluated for cumulative impacts and determined that cumulative impacts would be negligible.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.* There are no known resources within the project area that are listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. There would be no loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under ESA of 1973.* As described in the EA, no known threatened or endangered species (plant or animal), or critical habitat has been identified in the project area as considered in the EA.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.* As described in the EA, the proposed action does not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirement for protection of the environment. Officials from the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California were consulted on this proposal.

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Linda J. Kelly  
Manager,  
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Date